

Girl Scout Teahouse  
(Hains Point Teahouse) (Hains Point Inn)  
Hains Point  
East Potomac Park  
Washington, DC

HABS No. DC-549

HABS  
DC,  
WASH,  
430-

PHOTOGRAPHS

WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY  
MID-ATLANTIC REGION, NATIONAL PARK SERVICE  
DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR  
PHILADELPHIA, PENNSYLVANIA 19106

HABS  
DC,  
WASH.  
430-

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY

GIRL SCOUT TEAHOUSE HABS No. DC-549

(Hains Point Teahouse)  
(Hains Point Inn)

Location: Hains Point, East Potomac Park, Washington,  
D.C.

USGS Alexandria Quadrangle, Universal  
Transverse Mercator Coordinates:  
18.324470.4302880

Present Owner: National Capital Region  
National Park Service  
1100 Ohio Drive, S.W.  
Washington, D.C. 20242

Present occupant: Vacant

Significance: The Girl Scout Teahouse at Hains Point is significant in that it represents an early park pavilion structure designed to provide food service to visitors who motored to Hains Point by automobile. Since 1920 the Girl Scouts had operated a refreshment concession stand at Hains Point. In 1923 and 1924, this elaborate new shelter and comfort station were erected at the Point. The teahouse became an early facility for automobile visitation to the nation's capital when patterns of visitation were changing and the public began visiting Washington by automobile. The teahouse also represents the effective use of a modified classical revival architectural style for a park pavilion building.

PART 1. HISTORICAL INFORMATION

A. Physical History:

1. Date of erection: 1923-1924
2. Architect: Drawings appear to be drawn by Whiton Crane, Office of Public Buildings and Grounds, Corps of Engineers, U.S. Army, September 4, 1923. Drawings recommended by Earl G. Marsh, Superintendent of Construction, Office of Public Buildings and Grounds, Corps of Engineers, U.S. Army. Drawings signed by C.O. Sherrill, Lieut. Col., Corps of Engineers, U.S. Army in Charge of the Office of Public Buildings and Grounds. Drawings reviewed by J.A. Wetmore, Acting Superintending Architect, Treasury Department.
3. Original and subsequent owners: Office of Public Buildings and Grounds, Army Corp of Engineers, 1923-1925; Director of Public Buildings and Public Parks in the National Capital, 1925-1933; Office of National Parks, Buildings and Reservations, Department of the Interior, 1933-1934; National Capital Parks, National Park Service, 1934-1962; Region Six, National Park Service, 1962; National Capital Region, National Park Service, 1962-1969; National Capital Parks, National Park Service, 1969-1976; National Capital Region, National Park Service, 1976-date.
4. Builders, suppliers: Office of Public Buildings and Grounds, Army Corp of Engineers

5. Original plans and construction: Located in Record Group 79, drawings 33.3-1 through 33.3-43, Cartographic Branch, National Archives, 841 South Pickett St., Alexandria, Virginia. The original structure consisted of a central rectangular block of five bays, and within each bay is a pair of French doors with fanlight transom above on both the north and south elevation. Flanking both sets of French doors are square wooden pilasters. Attached to the south elevation is a six pier Mount Vernon style portico with Chinese chippendale balustrade surmounting the entire central block. Two slightly narrower wings extend from the central block, each three bays on the north and south elevation. Chimneys appear on the east and west elevations of the wings. The east wing originally contained toilets, and the west wing originally contained a lunch room and kitchen facilities. There was a lounge in the center block. Both wings were ornamented by laticework and ornamental outriggers extending from the roof line. Two lattice storage enclosures extended from the north elevation of the wings.

6. Alterations and additions: From 1947-1949 extensions were designed for the north elevation of the east and west wing of the teahouse making the enlarged structure roughly "C" shaped. The west wing extension (1947) was the larger of the two and included expanded kitchen service. It measured 30' x 25'8", and had a small porch with lattice garbage enclosure at the south end of its east elevation, and a small mechanical vault, high on its north elevation.

The east wing extension (1949) was smaller, measuring 22' x 20'. An 8' wall extended the west elevation of the east wing extension to the complimentary length of the west wing extension. The east wing extension was built to contain a snack bar and storage area. Both new wings were built to accommodate Government Services Inc., the National Park Service concessionaire which succeeded the Girl Scouts in running the teahouse.

A brick terrace was designed in 1949 between the east and west extension. The five sets of French door on the north elevation of the central block opened out on the terrace. At this time the central block served as the main dining room.

A long narrow addition was built on to the west wing kitchen extension to serve as a loading dock. It extended westward from the west kitchen porch. It was built during the 1947-1949 alterations.

Drawings for the 1947-1949 additions are located in the Cartographic Branch of the National Archives in the Record Group cited above.

#### B. Historical Context

Hains Point is ground reclaimed from what was once a marshy flat located on the extreme eastern end of Potomac Park. The reclamation work was carried on by the Engineering Corps of the United States Army under the direction of General Peter Conover Hains. To commemorate this work and the interest displayed in it, the name Hains Point was given it in honor of General Hains. Hains Point is located at the confluence of the Potomac and Anacostia Rivers and the Washington Ship Channel. It is the southernmost tip of the Island called East Potomac Park.

The reclamation of the Potomac Mud Flats and the excavation of the Tidal Basin had been authorized by Congress in an Act of August 2, 1882, which appropriated \$400,000 for the project. It was not however until March 3, 1897 when Congress passed Senate Bill 3,307 that:

the entire area formerly know as the Potomac Flats, and now being reclaimed, together with the tidal reservation, be, and the same are hereby, made and declared a public park, under the name Potomac Park, and to be forever held and used as a park for the recreation and pleasure of the people.

On August 24, 1912, Congress approved a sundry civil bill which appropriated \$25,000 for beginning the construction of a macadam roadway called the "Speedway" around the fringes of East Potomac Park. After a few more years of appropriations, the road was completed in 1916.

In 1914, Congress approved funding for the planting of 203 Japanese cherry trees along the road, and more were planted in 1916. These trees complemented the original Japanese cherry trees planted in 1912 around the Tidal Basin. During the war years, several acres of the park were used by the Boy Scouts as "war gardens" to produce corn. The first nine holes of the golf greens were constructed in 1917 and the last nine completed in 1922. Construction of a field house was authorized in 1917 to serve the golf course. During this era, 15 acres of East Potomac Park were occupied by 41 wooden buildings housing regular army troops on guard duty in Washington. After the war these buildings were torn down and an automobile tourist camp was set up on the same site near the railroad bridge.

East Potomac Park was divided into areas which included picnic grounds near the "Point", the 18 hole golf course within the perimeter of the "Speedway", the macadam road around the island, and with baseball fields and tourist camp near the northern end. In 1920, a cement walk was begun along the edge of the seawall entirely around the circular edge of the "Point" and a pipe rail fence was erected.

In 1920 a permit was granted to the Girl Scout Association of the District of Columbia to serve tea and refreshments to the public, and to erect a temporary shelter and install tables in the northern portion of the "Point". This proved to be an attractive service to the public. In 1922, the Office of Public Buildings and Grounds made a request to Congress to construct a comfort station at Hains Point. The increased use of East Potomac Park by motorists made it necessary to provide shelter and toilet facilities at the extreme end of the park, which is approximately 3 miles from the nearest adjacent location of a lodge or comfort station.

Drawings for the new shelter were approved by Clarence O. Sherrill, Lieutenant Colonel, Corps of Engineers U.S. Army in Charge of the Office of Public Buildings and Grounds in late 1923. Construction of the new shelter and comfort station was practically completed in 1924. In September, 1924, the Girl Scout Association, District of Columbia which had operated the lunch and refreshment room in the small temporary building near the Point were permitted to move into and occupy three rooms in the new building to operate a teahouse, after which their old building was torn down and the site of it returned to park land.

Meanwhile the Office of Public Buildings and Grounds was abolished and the Office of Public Buildings and Public Parks of the National Capital was created by act of Congress dated February 26, 1925. The new office consolidated the old Office of Public Buildings and Grounds with the office of Superintendent of the State, war and navy building. The new Director of the Office was still selected from officers of the Corp of Engineers, U.S. Army.

Appointed as director of the new agency, Lieutenant Colonel U.S. Grant III, informed the Girl Scouts that their concession at the teahouse expired on December 31, 1925 and would not be renewed. Food service concession at the teahouse was turned over to the newly formed Welfare and Recreation Association of Public Buildings and Grounds which was to be incorporated under the laws of the District of Columbia December 28, 1926, and was to serve as concessioner for the Public Parks of the national capital. This non-profit organization was the parent to the present day Guest Services Incorporated (GSI) which still performs the same function as concessioner to the parks.

Known as the Teahouse, the building continued to offer restaurant and snack bar services from the late 1920's, through 1962. Service was usually shut down during the winter months. A menu from the 1930's indicates that a variety of sandwiches, plate lunches and dinners were offered as well as a variety of wines and beer. In an era before air

conditioning, a summer evening drive to Hains Point to dine on the portico or rear patio of the Teahouse and catch the breeze coming across the waters must have been a pleasant attraction in a sweltering city. Visitation was especially heavy during the annual blooming of the Japanese cherry blossoms. The Japanese connection may account for the teahouse name.

On August 10, 1933, the Office of Public Buildings and Public Parks of the National Capital ceased to exist, and administration of Washington, D.C. parks were transferred to the National Park Service, U.S. Department of the Interior. The Welfare and Recreation Association of Public Buildings and Grounds continued to operate concessions including the teahouse.

On May 27, 1942 the General Manager of the Welfare and Recreation Association complained to the superintendent of National Capital Parks that war policies requiring elimination of unnecessary wear on tires and use of gasoline made it inconsistent to operate the Hains Point Tea House which must depend upon business by motorists for its support. He requested that the teahouse be closed for the duration of the war. Though the request was initially turned down for the season of 1942, by 1943, the teahouse was closed and remained closed for the duration of World War II.

Limited refreshment service returned to the teahouse June 3, 1945, initially only on weekends due to shortage of manpower and food supplies. However, by the middle of the summer the teahouse was opened to full capacity, the manager reporting that there was an urgent demand for beer. He further reported that he had gone into the liquor business and had to take out an ABC license for the teahouse. By 1946 plans were afoot to reestablish dining at the teahouse as it had been before the war.

On April 23, 1949, a fire damaged the snack bar attached to the teahouse, and funds became available through the fire insurance of the concessioner, now operating under the name



of Government Services, Inc., to make repairs. Plans were already afoot to expand the kitchen, so that the insurance money from the fire spurred on the project which led to the 1949-1950 east and west wing extensions to the building which included an expanded west kitchen wing and an east snack bar wing.

In 1950 Government Services, Inc. changed the name from the Hains Point Tea House to the Hains Point Inn.

In September of 1950, at the time when GSI undertook the annual seasonal closing of the teahouse, several Washington business men wrote letters requesting that the teahouse stay open year round. All agreed that the teahouse is a splendid restaurant, offering a great deal, not only to native Washingtonians, but to the large number of tourists and visitors who come to Washington for the full twelve months of the year. One called the spot one of the few eating spots in the D.C. area where a harassed businessman can spend a restful, pleasant eating hour convenient to the down town area with no parking problems. However, GSI continued their September closing stating that it was unprofitable to operate the teahouse after Labor Day.

In 1952 Government Services, Inc. operated the Hains Point Inn under a subconcessioner M.E. Foose. Mr. Foose continued until 1954, when the subconcession was awarded to David Nigrini for the second half of the 1954 summer season. Mr. Nigrini operated the Hains Point Inn until 1956. In 1957 the Inn was operated by David T. Lee under the name Cherry Blossom Inn.

In 1962, the teahouse operated for its last season, and when reopened on March 16, 1962, it served as a National Park Service visitors center. It continued to serve as a visitors center until 1967, but the construction of visitor information kiosks staffed by information receptionists throughout the Mall and Potomac Park superceded it, and it was not open in 1968.

In 1969 the teahouse became the Ecological Services Lab of the office of Professional Support, National Capital Parks. This arrangement continued until January 20, 1985,

when the condition of the building violated numerous health and safety codes for laboratory use. Toilets backed up in the building and large picnicing crowds used the sides of the building to urinate due to lack of nearby public facilities. Periodic flooding of the Potomac made access to the building difficult at certain times of the year. Traffic jams during periods of heavy park use overly tax the two lane drive to Hains Point, discouraging new uses of the structure which would attract more automobiles. Thus, the Park Service made the decision to remove the building and sought the proper approvals through the Section 106 process of the 1966,1980 National Historic Preservation Act. Concurrence in the proposal to tear down the building came from the Advisory Council on Historic Preservation on July 16, 1987.

## PART II ARCHITECTURAL INFORMATION

### A. General Statement:

1. Architectural character: The Hains Point Teahouse represents a classical revival pavilion park structure of the early 1920's. Its long low lying facade with Mount Vernon portico blends into its park like setting and contributes a pleasing and well formed architectural expression in a very scenic location at the confluence of the Washington Ship Channel and the Potomac River. Traveling by boat up the Potomac River, the Teahouse portico presents the viewer with the first architectural landmark at the southern tip of the District of Columbia. Its portico, Chinese chippendale balustrade, rows of pilasters and lattice wall panels, and outriggers combine to give the building a delicate laciness. The range of double french doors with fanlight apertures above on both sides of the buildings central block were no doubt designed to be opened to catch the cool breezes blowing in across the water. Visitors could sit underneath, as well as underneath the portico and the patio out in back, sip tea and enjoy the magnificent down river view. As a far pavilion away from the noise of the city, the teahouse represents a quieter more formal era, where patrons could motor down the "Speedway" to the Point and dine or snack in a setting of civility.

2. Conditions of the fabric: (Taken from a trip report of Hugh C. Miller, AIA, Chief Historical Architect, National Park Service, May, 1985). The one-story building of over 3,000 square feet is made up of a central space with wings and additions in the rear. The stucco brick or block walls built on a structural slab are generally sound, especially the older sections. The wooden columns of the front porch and ornamental woodwork (outlookers, trellis and other trim) need major repair or replacement and paint stripping before repainting. The windows and doors appear to be in fair to good condition, although there is some rotted wood and broken glass. Overall the structure envelope appears to be in good condition and the building seems to be shedding weather.

B. Description of Exterior

1. Overall dimensions: Original central block with two original wings, 96'10" x 21' 10"; portico 44' 10" x 13'4"; west wing extension, 30' x 25'8"; east wing extension, 22' x 18'; loading dock 9'6"; transformer vault 5'6" x 4'9".
2. Foundations: Cement slab foundation
3. Wall Construction: Brick covered with exterior stucco
4. Structural system, framing: brick walls
5. Porches: Wooden Mount Vernon facade portico with square piers and Chinese chippendale balustrade.
6. Chimneys: Originally there were chimneys centered on the east and west elevations of the east and west original wings. In the 1947-1949 additions, the chimney on the east elevation of the original east wing was removed. There is a small chimney at the east end of the original central block of the building. The chimneys were brick covered with stucco.

7. Openings:

a. Doorways and doors: There are five pair of French doors on the north elevation of the central block and five pair of doors on the south elevation of the central block. At this writing the glass panels of the French doors are covered with plywood. There is a semi-circular fanlight above each of the pair of French doors. The original west wing, a rest room facility, had a door each on its north, south, and west elevation. The original east wing, a kitchen and lunch room had a door on the north elevation. The 1947 kitchen addition to the west wing had a door in its west side. The loading dock attached to this addition has three doors facing north. The 1949 Snack Bar and Storage addition on the original east wing had a door on the east elevation of the addition facing the north terrace.

b. Windows and shutters: Windows are six over six pane double hung sash.

8. Roof:

a. Shape, covering: flat roof, built up slag with gravel.

b. Cornice: simplified classical entablature, portico has full classical entablature.

C. Description of Interior

1. Floor plans: See of original drawings and drawings of 1947-1949 additions in National Archives. The large interior room of the central block is 18' high. The flanking rooms of the wings are 12' high.

2. Stairways: none
  3. Flooring: vinyl tile over concrete
  4. Wall and ceiling finish: Plaster over brick walls
  5. Openings:
    - a. Doorways and doors: See enclosed drawings
    - b. Windows: Six over six double sash. See enclosed drawings for locations.
  6. Decorative features and trim: None on inside, which had been rehabilitated into rather bland government office space.
  7. Hardware: None of any consequence.
  8. Mechanical Equipment: Electric furnace for heating and air conditioning.
    - a. Heating, air conditioning, ventilation: central system electric driven.
    - b. Lighting: neon lighting
    - c. Plumbing: city water and sewage.
- D. Site:
1. General Setting and orientation: The Teahouse is sited at the south end of East Potomac Park facing down river. Ohio Drive, originally called the Speedway, curves around the front of the Teahouse in an elliptical half circle. Jutting out southward from Ohio Drive, the remainder of the grassy long fingered island of East Potomac Park ends at Hains Point.
    2. Historic Landscape Design: See drawings in National Archives.
  3. Out buildings: none

PART III. SOURCES OF INFORMATION

- A. Architectural Drawings: Record Group 79, drawings 33.3-1 through 33.3-43. Cartographic Branch, National Archives, 841 South Pickett St., Alexandria, Virginia

B. Bibliography

1. Primary Sources

Records of the Office of Public Buildings and Grounds, 1924-1925, Records of the Office of Public Buildings and Public Parks of the National Capital 1925-1933, Records of National Capital Parks, National Park Service, 1933-1959, located in Record Group 79-64A42, Suitland Record Center, National Archives, Suitland Maryland.

C.S. Ridley, Annual Report of the Chief of Engineers, 1920, Extract, Improvement and Care of Public Buildings and Grounds. Washington: Government Printing Office, 1920.

C.O. Sherrill, Annual Report of the Chief of Engineers, 1921, Improvement and Care of Public Buildings and Grounds. Washington: Government Printing Office, 1921.

C.O. Sherrill, Annual Report of the Chief of Engineers, 1922, Improvement and Care of Public Buildings and Grounds. Washington: Government Printing Office, 1923.

C.O. Sherrill, Annual Report of the Chief of Engineers, 1923, Improvement and Care of Public Buildings and Grounds. Washington: Government Printing Office, 1923.

C.O. Sherrill, Annual Report of the Chief of Engineers, 1924, Improvement and Care of Public Buildings and Grounds. Washington: Government Printing Office, 1924.

C.O. Sherrill, Annual Report of the Chief of Engineers, 1925, Improvement and Care of Public Buildings and Grounds. Washington: Government Printing Office, 1925.

U.S. Grant III, Annual Report of the Director of Public Buildings and Public Parks of the National Capital, 1926. Washington: Government Printing Office, 1926.

All the above may be found in the Natural Resource Library, U.S. Department of Interior, Washington, D.C.

## 2. Secondary sources

Gordon Chappell, Historic Resources Study, East and West Potomac Parks: A History. Denver Service Center, Historic Preservation Team, National Park Service, United States Department of the Interior, Denver, Colorado, 1973.

National Register Nomination Form, East and West Potomac Parks, 1973, National Register of Historic Places, Washington, D.C.

Classified Structures Field Inventory Report, "Hains Point Teahouse/Ecological Services Lab," 1975. Office of Professional Services, National Capital Region, National Park Service, Washington, D.C.

## C. Historic Views

1. "Air Picture of East Potomac Park," 1922, Reservation Files, Office of Land Use, National Capital Region, National Park Service, Washington, D.C.

2. "East Potomac Park, Hains Point Teahouse," Reservation Files, Office of Land Use, National Capital Region, National Park Service, Washington, D.C.

3. "Hains Point Tea House, East Potomac Park" November 21, 1949, Historic Photo Files, Office of Professional Services, National Capital Region, National Park Service, Washington, D.C.

#### PART IV. PROJECT INFORMATION

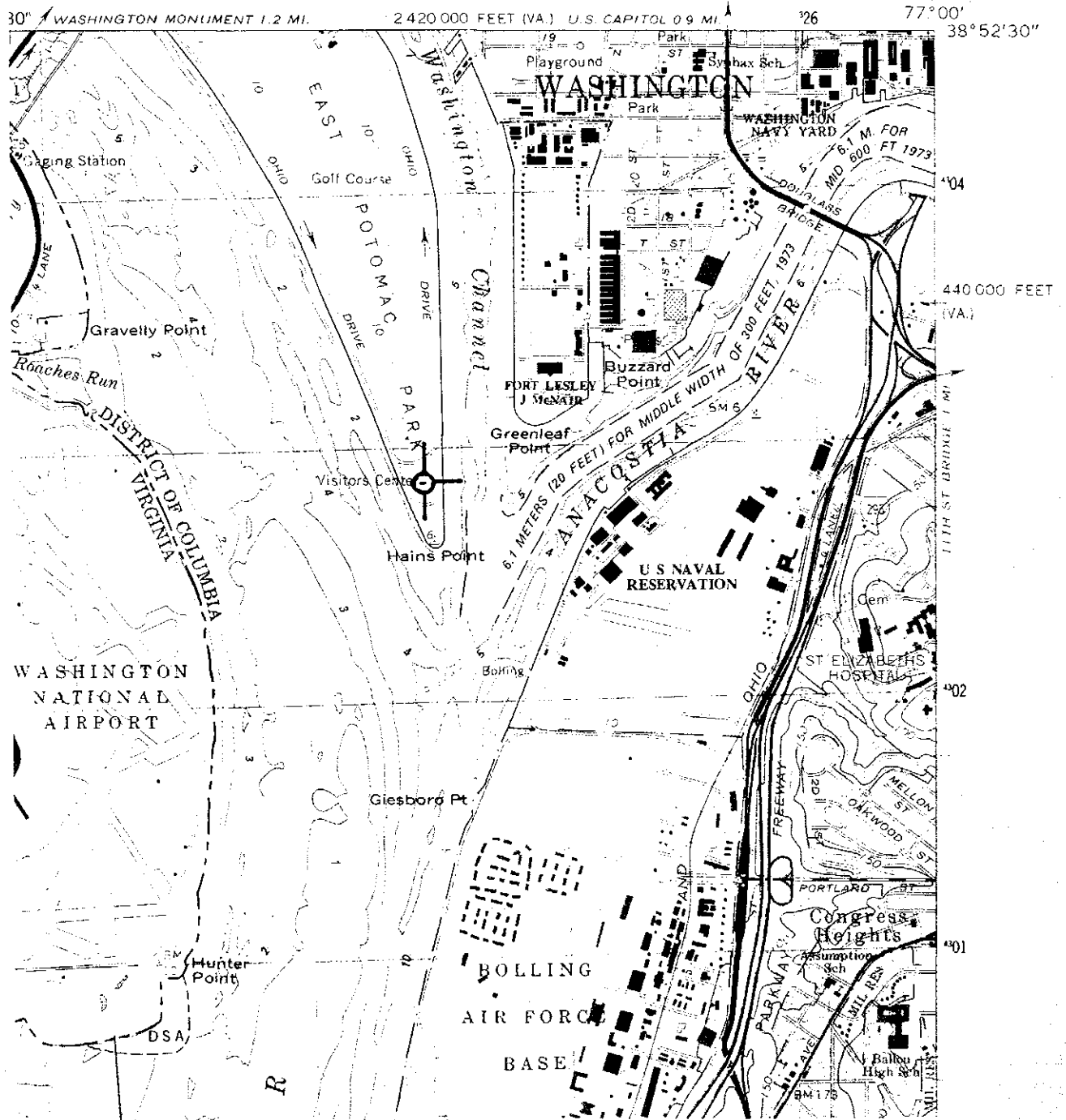
Consideration of the Teahouse was included in a Development Concept Plan for East Potomac Park developed in 1982. The preferred course of action identified in the plan called for retention of the Teahouse for public uses. However, seeking public uses did not bear fruit. Heavy park use and traffic jams around Hains Point worked to discourage the development of a new use of the Teahouse which would work to augment the human and vehicular impact on the park already overtaxed and overimpacted.

A panel of the full Advisory Council met at the Teahouse on June 24, 1987, and concurred with the proposal of National Capital Region, National Park Service to demolish the Girl Scout Teahouse. This HABS documentation is an Advisory Council requirement prior to demolition of the structure. This structure, included in the National Register nomination for East and West Potomac Park, is being demolished because: the park has no use for it, a food service facility is not being put back because park patrons prefer to bring their own picnics, rental use would tax limited parking, heavy visitor use makes access difficult due to constant traffic on the two lane Ohio drive around Hains Point, and periodic flooding of the Potomac River makes the building inhabitable.

Prepared by: Gary Scott  
Title: Regional Historian  
Affiliation: National Capital Region, National Park Service  
Date: October 20, 1987



ALEXANDRIA QUADRANGLE  
VIRGINIA-DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA-MARYLAND  
7.5 MINUTE SERIES (TOPOGRAPHIC-BATHYMETRIC)



566' IV NW  
(WASHINGTON EAST)